



**“Political party assistance in post-conflict societies.
What to do in Afghanistan and Burundi?”**

Report Expert Meeting

Lotte ten Hoove

Thursday 5 July 2007, The Hague



Introduction

Political party development plays a key role in the stabilization and democratization of post-conflict societies, i.e. countries that have recently initiated a process of democratic state building after a period of violent intra-state conflict. Whereas international donor agencies provide substantial support to elections, civil society development, state-building and other aspects of post-conflict democratization, political party assistance has often remained limited.

In order to gain a better understanding of the various analytical and more practical challenges of political party development, to learn from previous international activities, and to improve the effectiveness of future international party assistance programs in post-conflict societies, the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD) and the Clingendael Institute organized an expert meeting in The Hague on 5 July 2007. The meeting was also intended to inform the work of the Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy (NIMD), which is considering new programmes in support of political parties in post-conflict countries, particularly in Afghanistan and Burundi. For the Conflict Research Unit (CRU) of the Clingendael Institute the meeting presented an opportunity to share some of the findings of its recent research on postwar democracy and political party assistance, including the transformation of former rebel movements into political parties, and to gain possible new insights in the field of state-building in fragile states.

The morning sessions were dedicated to a discussion of the key features of post-conflict environments, the main lessons learned on the development of post-conflict political parties and party systems, and the policy implications of post-conflict environments on the work of a party aid organization like the NIMD. During the afternoon session the cases of Afghanistan and Burundi were closely considered and recommendations were made with regard to the design of potential NIMD programmes in these countries.

Political Parties and Party Systems in Post-Conflict Societies

The first presentation by Jeroen de Zeeuw focused on the characteristics of political parties and party systems in post-conflict environments. There is a tendency by policy makers and practitioners to homogenize post-conflict situations, which in reality can vary substantially. Caution is therefore needed when making generalizations about the development and functioning of political parties in post-conflict settings. Presenting them, moreover, as 'tabula rasa' situations where institutions can be developed from scratch is misleading, as many old institutions continue to exist after the war. One generalization that can be made is that the political, economic and social conditions of post-conflict countries are hardly conducive to the growth of political parties. Despite being presented with similarly difficult post-conflict conditions, some parties clearly have an advantage over others, because of the nature and the outcome of the conflict; strong, militarily victorious parties may enjoy privileges that new, weak parties do not have.



One of the participants raised the question on the uniqueness of post-conflict situations. That is, what makes these situations so different from other fragile or unstable settings, particularly when it comes to democracy promotion and assistance to political party development? Some of the distinguishing features between today's post-conflict democracies and other young democracies include the existence of a peace settlement that serves as an important reference point for future political developments, the relatively high levels of violence and insecurity that often prevail, the presence of international actors (e.g. in the form of peacekeeping troops, transitional administrations and aid agencies), as well as the deep social cleavages, tensions and mistrust that resonate in the political system.

A distinction was made between four types of post-conflict parties: 1) traditional ruling parties, with relatively strong party organizations and grassroots support (e.g. FRELIMO in Mozambique); 2) parties that emerged out of politico-military groups or armed rebel groups (e.g. RENAMO in Mozambique, CNDD-FDD in Burundi and the ex-mujahedeen parties in Afghanistan); 3) ethnic parties; and 4) new, small (special interest or reformist) parties. A further distinction was made between different types of party systems. Two types of party system are said to be particularly prevalent in post-conflict societies, each with its own set of challenges. In a dominant-authoritarian system in which one party is all-powerful the main challenge is to improve accountability. In a pulverized or fragmented party system, the focus should be on governability and coalition-formation. We should be aware that the power configuration of a party system is relative and highly dynamic, particularly in a post-conflict situation. The balance of power can change quickly and may necessitate a change in the approach of international actors. It was stressed that, in any case, we should focus on the politically relevant actors and parties, even if it may be extremely difficult to identify them in a highly fragmented party system.

Political Party Assistance in Post-Conflict Societies: Dilemmas and Guidelines

The second presentation by Lotte ten Hoove focused on the implications of the difficult post-conflict conditions for the work of party aid organizations. Key policy dilemmas and party aid dimensions were discussed. Tom Bridle also addressed the practical ways in which organizations such as NDI or NIMD could proceed in post-conflict countries. A number of practical guidelines and recommendations can be deduced from these presentations and from the discussions that followed:

- Democratization is a politically-contentious process, particularly in volatile post-conflict settings. Without strong political and state institutions, some of its components (such as elections and political party competition) can sometimes raise tensions or, in extreme cases, lead to renewed conflict. However, the institutionalization of a multiparty system is a necessary step towards the creation of a stable democratic political system, which is widely considered to be conducive to development, the protection of human rights and peaceful conflict prevention. A gradual approach for introducing democratization and political party competition is therefore needed in post-conflict societies. Nevertheless, early engagement in post-conflict transition processes by party aid organizations like NIMD can help strengthen the necessary institutions for democratization.



- When the NIMD receives a request for political party assistance in a specific post-conflict country, the quality and sustainability of the peace settlement are determining for its engagement; the peace agreement should be conducive to the development of a democratic multiparty political system.
- An inclusive inter-party dialogue is an important instrument to help parties to overcome mistrust, to moderate positions, and to build consensus on issues that have not been dealt with in the peace agreement.
- In the selection of political partners for direct support, effectiveness of assistance and ‘doing no harm’ should be guiding principles. An organization like the NIMD should always try to identify and support those actors that can most substantially and effectively contribute to the democratic peace building process. In many cases this means engaging with parties that may lack democratic practices and have a violent history, but are nonetheless indispensable for the democratic process. In other cases we need to be firm in denying direct party support to those parties that still keep armed militias, resort to violence and thereby structurally obstruct the democratic process. We should be aware that these two requirements can be contradictory; organizations may put their own integrity at stake when providing the most powerful and relevant political actors, who may not respect the rule of law, with direct party assistance.
- On the issue of neutrality, the participants agreed that a party aid organization like the NIMD can not remain neutral when intervening in a political process. This obliges us to continuously reflect on our assumptions and the lens through which we look at the role of political parties in a democratization process. What do we perceive as desirable outcomes and what will we do if local actors disagree with these perceived desirable outcomes?
- Understanding the (changing) balance of power and the differences between types of parties is crucial. Especially in a post-conflict setting, the differences between a strong, ruling party that dominates the political system and controls a country’s resources and the much weaker opposition parties cannot be underestimated. Putting them together in a multiparty training can sometimes be counterproductive. We should be aware of the different goals of single-party trainings (on specific topics and skills) and multiparty trainings (process-oriented, aim to improve dialogue).
- Democratic state and nation building are long-term processes and a long-term engagement is therefore needed. Long-term strategic planning needs to be reconciled with flexibility and adaptability in the execution and implementation of programmes on the ground.
- Goals should be moderate and determined by the circumstances on the ground. We should be aware that (domestic) societal, economic, institutional and historical factors have a stronger impact on the development of post-conflict parties and party systems than international support. One of the participants stressed that the overall objectives the NIMD aims for should be defined in a ‘mission accomplished’ scenario. When an organization has achieved its objectives, its exit strategy could be implemented.
- Donor coordination: A long-term political party programme should be integrated in the broader democratization, reconstruction and peace building agendas. If complementary action of international actors fails to materialize or tails off, the NIMD should reconsider its own engagement.



- Any actor involved in a post-conflict democratization process should be willing to accept risks. As one of the participants noted, a risk assessment should not only take account of the actual security situation on the ground, but also of the costs for the aid organization and its local partners if the process derails completely. A willingness to accept risks implies a responsibility of NIMD staff on the ground to actively manage, monitor and evaluate the process and to have adequate contingency plans in case things do go wrong.
- Special efforts should be made to help parties to broaden the political debate that too often remains one-dimensional (exclusive focus on ethnicity for example). It is important to assist parties to get organized around tangible policy issues that can have a direct positive impact on people's lives, and to build coalitions on the basis of political goals and ideas.
- Any post-conflict party assistance programme should be based on a good understanding of the conflict, the nature and background of the political parties and the power balance. Continuous analysis is needed.

The Difficult Democratic Transition in Afghanistan

The afternoon sessions concentrated on the political party systems in two post-conflict countries: Afghanistan and Burundi.

Antonio Giustozzi's presentation focused on the transition from armed groups to political parties in Afghanistan. This demilitarization and transformation process faces enormous challenges. First, it was argued that the distribution of tasks and responsibilities among the multitude of international actors involved in the Afghan peace building process proved ineffective. Indeed, this division of labour provided a disincentive to establishing strategic priorities; each organization bearing responsibility for a specific process within the overall post-conflict reconstruction machinery started working in its own niche without an agreed view on how to proceed. Organizing the elections was for example the task of UNAMA, while ISAF had to provide security. According to Giustozzi UNAMA was driven by short-term bureaucratic concerns, which had culminated in an inapt electoral law, while priority should have been given to establishing security. The two processes were carried in parallel rather than logical order.

Second, factionalism and insecurity represent major disincentives to real demilitarization of the armed groups in Afghanistan. The local players adopt a façade demilitarization under pressure of international actors while maintaining large militias underground.

Third, the major parties with links to armed militias seem to have very little interest in real demilitarization. What will they gain from it? The approach to the transition varied according to the expectation of the different politico-military factions. The weak and marginalized groups were more inclined to the establishment of a functioning political system than the militarily victorious groups. The latter were more likely to resist – as was the case with Jami'at Islami for example. Indeed, the risks were high. Junbesh, Dostum's party that did invest seriously in political structures and demilitarization, provides a striking example of the potentially negative effect that a transition from a military to a political organization can



have; because of strong internal resistance to the organizational reforms, Junbesh nearly collapsed.

Giustozzi considered the short term prospects for the institutionalization of a multiparty political system in Afghanistan rather dim. He stressed that one cannot underestimate the impact on the democratic process of the local, agrarian structures based on the power of landlords and rural leaders. Even where there were no strongmen or warlords, during the elections tribal notables massively interfered with the vote of the population, as for example in the south-east of the country.

In the final discussion the question was raised whether or not genuine democratic political parties can become relevant players at this stage and whether or not it is worth investing in them. The general opinion supported the proposed NIMD approach in Afghanistan; working directly with political parties was considered to be premature at this stage because of the fluidity of the party landscape. Participants recommended to invest in stimulating the political debate. It was stressed that NIMD could support the dissemination of ideas and the development of the general sense of what constitutes a political community and a political party. Giustozzi mentioned the creation of service centres and websites, and pointed to the need to support Afghan political intellectuals. The idea of a political education programme was welcomed. However, it was emphasized that the NIMD should always focus on the relevant political actors; simultaneous efforts should therefore be made to keep the door open to direct cooperation with political parties, to approach political party leaders, and to invite young party members to participate in NIMD's political education programme.

Political Party Development in Burundi: Challenges and Recommendations

The presentation on Burundi by Devon Curtis provided an overview of the political situation since the outbreak of violence in 1993. Looking back at the process, Curtis highlighted a recurrent perception that in the case of Burundi perhaps multiparty democracy and majoritarian style elections were introduced too quickly in the early 1990s and have instigated the ethnicized conflict that was to follow. In 1998 increasing donor pressure to reinstate multi-party democracy, together with active regional mediation (through Tanzanian President Nyerere and South African President Mandela), led to multi-party peace negotiations. The Arusha peace process was perceived as an elite-led process. The two main rebel movements (CNDD-FDD and PALIPEHUTU-FNL) did not participate, while many small groups that were seen as potential spoilers were included rather than marginalized, providing them unintentionally with a platform. Moreover, the transitional process inadvertently encouraged factionalism of parties. The Arusha agreement, signed in August 2000, was very comprehensive, setting out extensive power sharing arrangements, the electoral process and the definition of a political party. However, military hostilities continued.

New elections were held in 2005 and the CNDD-FDD easily won the ballot. The former Hutu-based rebel movement has been in power since then. The democratic transition currently faces important challenges. First, there are increasing authoritarian tendencies, with the CNDD-FDD dominating state institutions, arresting opposition members and



journalists, targeting FRODEBU officials in their operations against FNL, being involved in corruption and lacking competent civil servants. Second, security remains a problem. There is little progress in the implementation of the agreement between the government and FNL (signed in 2006) and the worrying idea arises among several political parties that it is helpful to have close links with armed groups in order to win elections. Third, one observes leaderships struggles and splits within almost all parties. And finally, the relations between the Burundian government and international organizations present in the country (particularly the UN mission) are tense. Notwithstanding these challenges, we should realize that the transition from an authoritarian to a democratic political system is a long term process, and in the case of Burundi this process is backed by important international financial and technical assistance.

With regard to the role of political parties in Burundi it was stressed that many people join parties for job opportunities, not for ideological conviction. Currently there are over forty political parties in Burundi. Most parties lack any ideological or political basis and are extremely fluid organizations, with members moving in and out depending on personal ambitions. It was argued that it is not realistic at this point to focus on the strengthening of the party's ideological platforms or political programmes. Instead it was recommended to the NIMD to concentrate efforts on:

1. Transparency and accountability: assist the internal organizational development of political parties;
2. Service delivery: encourage parties to focus on tangible issues and on the improvement of basic service delivery to the population;
3. Party financing and anti-corruption: help to establish a political party finance law; support auditing capacity; encourage the creation of standing committees in Parliament that could investigate corruption and human rights abuses;
4. Support a continued Disarmament-Demobilization-Reintegration process;
5. Inter-party dialogue: help parties to work together and to build trust and mutual understanding through multiparty platforms, trainings and meetings.

Further observations were made on the broader democratization process in Burundi. Concerning the state context, no structural changes have been made so far: informal institutions are resilient, there is still a lack of qualified staff and patronage and clientelistic practices prevail. Thus, strengthening checks and balances in the state system and a depoliticisation of the military are all-important. Another crucial factor in the democratic peace building process is the involvement of neighboring countries. Whereas the conflict as well as the peace process clearly had regional dynamics, peace building programmes and funding rarely cross national borders. Regional and international donors need to develop an overall coordinated strategy. The *Bureau intégré des Nations unies au Burundi* (BINUB) along with the UN Peacebuilding Commission, which aim to develop an integrated peace consolidation support strategy, are a good example in this regard. Furthermore, it was recommended to involve political parties from neighboring countries in a political party programme in Burundi. This kind of peer work, allowing Burundian parties to learn from the best practices of parties in i.e. Uganda, Tanzania and Rwanda, could be facilitated by South African partners in cooperation with the NIMD.



Closure

Roel von Meijfeldt, executive director of the NIMD, closed the expert meeting by thanking the Clingendael Institute for their constructive cooperation, and the presenters and all the participants for their input. Political party assistance to post-conflict societies remains a relatively new field of expertise and he expressed the hope that there will be future opportunities for cooperation and exchange of ideas between academics and practitioners.



Annex 1: Programme Expert Meeting

Wednesday 4 July 2007

19:00

Dinner with invited guests

Thursday 5 July 2007

8:30 – 9:00

Registration and coffee

9:00 – 9:15

Opening and welcome
Roel von Meijenfeldt (NIMD)

9:15 – 10:00

Introduction

Challenges of democratization, political party development and transformation of warring factions into political parties in post-conflict societies

Speakers: Jeroen de Zeeuw (Clingendael Institute) and Lotte ten Hoove (NIMD)

10:00 – 11:00

Discussion
Moderator: Marco Mezzera (Clingendael Institute)

11:00 – 11:15

Coffee break

11:15 – 11:45

First Session

What to do in order to strengthen the multiparty political system in post-conflict societies?: legal frameworks, political party and political finance regulation.

Speakers: Tom Bridle (NDI)

11:45 – 12:30

Discussion
Moderator: Álvaro Pinto Scholtbach (NIMD)

12:30 – 13:30

Lunch

13:30 – 14:30

Second session

Two case studies: political party development in Afghanistan and Burundi

Speakers: Antonio Giustozzi (Crisis States Research Center, London School of Economics) and Devon Curtis (University of Cambridge)

14:30 – 15:30

Discussion
Moderator: Luc van de Goor (Clingendael)

15:30 – 15:45

Coffee break



15:45 – 16:45

Third session

The role of international actors; dilemmas and guidelines for engagement

Speakers: Thomas Huyghebaert (UNDP Brussels) **cancelled** and Steven Griner (Organization of American States) **cancelled**

16:45 – 17:30

Reactions from the field of international cooperation and from policy and decision makers
Moderator: Álvaro Pinto Scholtbach (NIMD)

17:30 – 18:00

Wrap up and closure
Roel von Meijenfeldt (NIMD)

18:00

Reception

19:00

Dinner (optional)



Annex 2: List of participants

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